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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002321

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [HUMANR](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: POLOFF VISITS THANH HOA FULL GOSPEL PROTESTANTS, PROVINCE
CONFIRMS TWO ECVN CONGREGATIONS TO REGISTER

REF: A) HANOI 2170; B) HANOI 1520; C) HANOI 1666; D) HANOI 2245

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Summary

11. (SBU) On September 8, Poloff visited the Thanh Hoa community in which members of the Full Gospel Protestant Church have recently suffered police harassment and beatings. Poloff met at the church with one church member and his neighbors. During a separate meeting with Poloff, provincial officials confirmed that two local officers received administrative punishments for their participation in the June 18 beating of Protestants; acknowledged other recent reported beatings of church members; and, asserted that the province is investigating these incidents. These local officials also noted that two of five ethnic minority congregations identified by the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN) have been approved for registration as soon as the requisite paperwork is complete. End Summary.

Thieu Vien Officials

12. (SBU) On September 8, Poloff met with Thieu Vien Commune People's Committee Chairman Nguyen Xuan Lai, along with provincial level Religious Affairs officials, to discuss the recent harassment of several members of the United Gospel Church of Vietnam, a.k.a. "The Full Gospel Church," (refs A-C). Lai explained house church owner Le Thi Minh had broken the law by holding meetings of outsiders in her home and that local citizens were upset at the "disruptions" caused by these meetings. Poloff encouraged the chairman and commune staff to increase the space for religion within their community in line with the GVN's framework on religion and to allow the gatherings at the Minh home.

House Church Conditions

13. (SBU) In his meeting with Poloff, house church member Le Ngoc Hop stated that the house church members only want to worship in peace in their community. This statement aroused several onlookers, and one explained that the local community harasses members of the house church because they "do not dignify the dead" and because they convene meetings of outsiders, singing loudly, without a permit.

Provincial Officials

14. (SBU) Bui Hai Vinh, Director of Thanh Hoa's Provincial Department of Religion and Ethnicities, confirmed to Poloff that the commune had punished two security officials for the beating incident on June 18 (Ref B). Both were given administrative punishment under Party

Directive 150 (CP/150). One official was fined 400,000 VND (USD 25, or around one quarter of a year's salary in Thanh Hoa Province) for beating house church leader Nguyen Trung Ton. A second official received a letter of reprimand for failing to intervene to prevent the beating. The victim Ton also received a letter of reprimand. Vinh could not explain what significance such a letter may have for a regular citizen. He also confirmed that the recent report of other beatings of Full Gospel members in another Thanh Hoa community (Ref A) is true, and that the People's Committee has instructed district officials to investigate these incidents.

15. (SBU) Vinh noted that the province recently received, from the GVN's Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), a list of five ethnic H'mong congregations identified by the ECVN in Muong Lat District as "mature congregations" that should be easy for provincial officials to register quickly. (Note: We passed this list to the CRA on August 30. Ref D. End Note.) Vinh stated that the province has already approved two of these five house churches in Tam Trung Village for registration by the end of September as pilot registrations for the other three. The registrations will be official as soon as the requisite paperwork has been completed. Vinh promised to inform Post when the congregations have received their final certificates of registration.

Comment

16. (SBU) The relative ease, after several false starts, with which we visited the actual Full Gospel house church may suggest that local officials have finally grasped the importance of addressing this matter and responding to international concerns. We hope that this will translate into fewer problems for the Protestants in the coming months. The news about the registration of the two ECVN congregations in Thanh Hoa is especially encouraging as it seems that the GVN has instructed localities to begin registering at least some congregations quickly. End Comment.

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